Origins of the Bodfish family of Naseby v01
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by Francis Howcutt

Naseby in 1795 by Samuel Ireland[1]

[1] https://archive.org/details/bib_fict_4103270/page/n35/mode/2up

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Introduction

Bodfish is not a common surname. The hearth tax list for Northamptonshire in the year ending Lady Day 1674 includes over 22,000 names – the vast majority of householders in the county at the time.[2] Of these, the only two people recorded with the surname Botfish, Bodfish or a plausible variation were at Sibbertoft and Arthingworth. An individual whose name was written as 'William Redish' was excused from paying tax for his one hearth at Flore and may possibly also have been a family member.

It is feasible that the Bodfish families who lived in Northamptonshire in the 17th and 18th centuries may be descendants of one or more of the five sons – Richard, Robert, Simon, Thomas and John – who were mentioned when John Botfysh of Whetstone, Leicestershire (some 17 miles north-west of Naseby) made his will in July 1534[3], but this is by no means certain.

The lack of signatures in their marriage register entries at Naseby indicates that most, if not all, members of the Bodfish family who lived there were illiterate until well into the 19th century. Illiteracy was presumably one reason for the vast range of spellings of the surname that can be found and which are discussed in Appendix A.

This article does not dwell on all references to the surname, even in Northamptonshire, but focuses on evidence for the origins of George Bodfish who married Sarah Chester at Naseby in 1734. George and Sarah established a family there which later adopted the version Bott; some of their descendants remain in the vicinity to the present day.

Thank you to:
- Northamptonshire Archives for curating and making available parish registers and other historical documents.
- Internet Archive, the National Library of Scotland and FamilySearch for making freely available online digitised versions of books, maps and other resources.
- Mary Bodfish who first drew my attention to the will of John Botfysh of Whetstone and with whom I have discussed an earlier draft of this paper.

The distances between places mentioned in the text are the shortest walking distances.

Internet links cited were checked on the date of this Introduction. If you find that one no longer works or its destination has changed for the worse, the Wayback Machine may be able to help you retrieve the material that used to be there.[4]

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30 December 2024
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[2] The National Archives: E179/254/14.
https://www.parishchest.com/northamptonshire-hearth-tax-index-1673-1674-10546.php
[3] Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland: PR/1/252. Archdeaconry of Leicester wills registry book, folio 91.
[4] https://web.archive.org/

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George Bodfish (1705-1786)

George Bodfish married Sarah Chester at Naseby on 9 June 1734. Neither the parish register or bishops transcript contain details about him other than his name. The record of his burial there on 29 January 1786 states that George Bodfish was a widower and that tax was not due (presumably because of poverty) but does not record an age or provide further information. So, there is a fairly long period within which Sarah Chester's husband might have been baptised.

These indexes have been checked for plausible baptisms of Sarah Chester's husband during the period 1680-1734:

- Northamptonshire Baptism Index (compiled by Alan Clarke & Karen Lyman-Clarke)
- Ancestry indexes to its scans of Northamptonshire & Warwickshire parish registers
- FindMyPast index to its scans of Leicestershire parish registers

The only suitable entry found is at Sibbertoft, a parish three miles from Naseby, whose register records the baptism on 1 April 1705 of 'George Sn of Jn & Eliz. Boatfish'.

Further evidence consistent with Sarah Chester's husband coming from Sibbertoft are:

- No record has been found for an infant burial of the child who was baptised in 1705 or that could be of his marriage other than the one that took place in 1734 at Naseby.
- The child baptised in 1705 would have been about 29 years old at the time of the 1734 marriage and five years older than Sarah Chester who had been baptised at Naseby in April 1710.

Naseby, Sibbertoft and Arthingworth, based on Ordnance Survey maps c.1900[5]

[5] https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=13.0&lat=52.41367&lon=-0.93281&layers=1&b=ESRIWorld&o=100

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Bodfish surname in Leicestershire & Northamptonshire

References to people with the surname Boatfish/Bodfish/Botfish and its spelling variations can be found in Leicestershire at least as far back as the early 16th century. Indexes compiled by FindMyPast to its images of entries in Leicestershire parish registers record the number and range of these events for individuals with the surname or a plausible variation during the period before 1700:

Parish	Baptisms	Marriages	Burials	Total	Year range
Aylestone		1		1	1591
Braunstone St Peter	4	1	3	8	1588-1625
Bringhurst & Drayton		2		2	1679-1687
Claybrooke			1	1	1563
Desford	1	1	3	5	1627-1650
Enderby	3	1	1	5	1609-1616
Leicester St Mary de Castro		1		1	1637
Peckleton	1			1	1644
Saddington	1			1	1670
Whetstone	17	2	10	29	1548-1638
TOTAL	27	9	18	52	1548-1687

Because of defects in surviving parish register coverage and possibly indexing errors, this table is not a comprehensive count of events for family members in the county during the period. However, it provides clear evidence that Whetstone was important in the 16th and early 17th century (56% of the total records), with records from Aylestone, Braunstone, Bringhurst, Enderby and Saddington - the other parishes listed above which are between Leicester and the Northamptonshire border - contributing a further 33%. This suggests a tendency during the period for some of those with the surname to gravitate from Whetstone towards Northamptonshire. The only probate records found for people in Leicestershire with the surname before 1750 also come from the area between Leicester and Northamptonshire:

Year	Name	Description	Parish
1534	John Botfysh		Whetstone
1580	William Botffishe		Whetstone
1584	Robert Botfishe	Yeoman	Fleckney
1635	Rice Botfish	Yeoman	Whetstone

In addition to the difficulties found in Leicestershire, research into the history of the family in Northamptonshire is hampered by a complete lack of bishops transcripts before 1706 and the absence of any local Bodfish probate records from the county during the period concerned. The only reference to the surname earlier than 1650 that has been detected by Ancestry's indexes to the Northamptonshire registers that it has scanned is the marriage of 'Richard House & Agnes Bodfysh' which took place at Greens Norton on 26 October 1579. Table 1 of an erudite study by Stephen Swailes reveals that 28.2% of Northamptonshire parishes lack any registers that have survived from before 1650.[6]

[6] *Northamptonshire's parish registers: Survival Estimates and curious content* by Stephen Swailes. Northamptonshire Past & Present number 73 (2020), pages 48-60.
https://www.northamptonshirerecordsociety.org.uk/pdf/npp/number/npp-n73.pdf

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Births and baptisms in the county's surviving parish registers have been meticulously indexed by Alan Clarke and Karen Lyman-Clarke for the period 1650-1699. In addition, marriages and burials for the period have been indexed to its own standards by Ancestry. These sources point to the number of events in Northamptonshire involving the Boatfish/Bodfish/Botfish surname or a plausible variation during these 50 years being:

Parish	Baptisms	Marriages	Burials	Total	Year range
Arthingworth	6		4	10	1651-1695
Brington	1			1	1682
Brixworth	3		1	4	1689-1693
Flore	1			1	1686
Northampton St Sepulchre		1		1	1690
West Haddon	2			2	1687-1695
Yelvertoft	1			1	1689
TOTAL	14	1	5	20	

Almost all these events took place within ten miles of the border with Leicestershire.

Bodfish families at Sibbertoft and Arthingworth

St Andrew Arthingworth

This section is not an exhaustive history of people with the surname who have lived in the two parishes but focuses on those who were or may have been close relations of George Bodfish who married Sarah Chester.

Research into the history of Sibbertoft is handicapped by the lack of registers for the parish surviving from before 1680. The hearth tax lists for 1670[7] and for 1673-74 both include a man with the name George Botfish as exempt on grounds of poverty from paying the tax for his one hearth at Sibbertoft. The only other householder in the 1673-74 list for Northamptonshire with the Bodfish surname or an obvious variation was Widdow Bodfish, who was liable to pay tax on her one hearth at Arthingworth, a village about six miles east of

[7] The National Archives: E179/157/446.

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Sibbertoft. That record evidently relates to the same person as 'Mary Botfish widdow' who was buried at Arthingworth on 23 August 1679.[8]

More about this Mary's family can be gleaned from these entries in the Arthingworth registers:

- 2 February 1651[9] - John the son of Thomas Botfish and Mary his wife was baptised
- 1 April 1655 - Sarah Bottfish the daughter of Thomas Bottfish and of Marye his wife baptised
- 11 July 1657 - Richard Bottfishe the sonn of Thomas Botfish and of Mary his wife baptised
- 4 November 1659 - Thomas Botfish buryed

There was at least one other child in the family as 'Mary Botfish daughter of Widdow Botfish' was buried at Arthingworth on 20 December 1672. The Arthingworth parish registers only extend back to 1650, so it is possible that Thomas and Mary had other children before that year and plausible that George of Sibbertoft may have been one of them.

George Bodfish (-1710)

A full list of the inhabitants of Rothwell hundred was drawn up in 1697 in connection with the Duty on Births, Marriages and Burials.[10] The names George Botfish, John Botfish and Susana Botfish appear in its Sibbertoft section, one after another. Their relationships are not stated but comparison of this list with the burials in 1710 and 1724 that are mentioned below suggests that George and his wife Susannah were John's parents. No records or other indications of existence have been found of other children of John and Susanna, which implies that if there were any they would have been born before the Sibbertoft register starts in 1680.

When George Bottefish was buried at Sibbertoft on 9 November 1710, he was described as 'eleemosynary' (i.e. a person who subsists on charity). Susannah Bodfish, a widow, was buried there on 5 June 1724. No record has been found of George and Susannah's marriage.

John Bodfish (c.1675-1727)

The parish register of Dingley, Northamptonshire records the marriage by licence of John Botfish of Sibbertoft & Elizabeth Goll of Theddingworth on 30 July 1702.[11] Sibbertoft parish register states that John Botfish and Elizabeth Goll were married by Mr Stiles of Dingley.[12] An explanation for the difference between the date recorded at Dingley and the range of dates implied at Sibbertoft may be that the latter entry points to the period during which the marriage was noted in that particular register. As Elizabeth Goll was baptised at Theddingworth on 1 February 1676/1677, it is therefore reasonable to estimate John's birth as having taken place about 1675, provided the marriage in 1702 was his first. In any case, it is likely that John was born before 1680 when the Arthingworth register commences.

[8] This person is not to be confused with 'Mary Bodfish the wife of Thomas Botfish' who was buried at Arthingworth on 3 September 1678 and whose husband (also named Thomas) was evidently still alive at that time.
[9] It is not certain from the context whether the year '1651' is Old Style or New Style.
[10] Northamptonshire Archives: C(TM)90; indexed transcript by Christine Vialls.
[11] See Appendix B for details of the origins of Elizabeth Goll.
[12] The entry in the Sibbertoft register does not have a precise date but is written after a marriage on 25 August 1702 and before one on 5 November 1702.

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John & Elizabeth had these children baptised and/or buried at Sibbertoft:

	Baptised	Married	Buried
John	1703	Catherine Yates 1742	1778 Sibbertoft
George	1705	Sarah Chester 1734	1786 Naseby
William	1706	n/a	1706 Sibbertoft
Susanna	1710/11	James Cooper 1735	1760 Orlingbury
William	1713	n/a	1714 Sibbertoft
Elizabeth		n/a	1714 Sibbertoft
Peter	1715	n/a?	1741 Sibbertoft
Ann	1717/8		
Thomas	1721		

John Bodfish, described as a labourer, was buried at Sibbertoft on 26 September 1727.

St Helen Sibbertoft

No burial is recorded at Sibbertoft for John's wife or widow. She almost certainly went to live with their son George at Naseby, where the parish register records the burial of 'Elizabeth Bodfish, a widow' on 9 June 1746.[13]

Conclusion

There is no doubt that George Bodfish who married Sarah Chester at Naseby in 1734 was the same person as the child baptised at Sibbertoft in 1705. The case for the Bodfish family of Sibbertoft originating at Arthingworth is strong but by no means certain.

[13] Between 1721 (when John & Elizabeth's last child was christened at Sibbertoft) and 1769, Northamptonshire Burial Index contains no Elizabeths or 'widows' whose surname was Boatfish, Bodfish, Bott, Boat or an obvious variation, apart from the 1746 entry at Naseby and people whose descriptions (e.g. as an infant or the wife of a man whose name was not John) demonstrate that they could not have been John's wife or widow.

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Appendix A: The Bodfish surname at Naseby and its variations

Between 1735 and 1744, George & Sarah Bodfish had five children baptised at Naseby. Their three sons were then responsible for a total of 31 offspring who were baptised in the same village between 1763 and 1791. Numerous other entries in the Naseby parish registers also relate to the family. From 1734 to 1812, the name is always spelled there as BODFISH, BOTFISH or BOTTFISH. The earliest other variations at Naseby are references to his 'son' George BOAT and his daughter Sarah BOAT in the will of Moses Chester (made on 4 April 1749 and proved at Northampton Archdeaconry Court on 4 May 1751).

In 1798 the Husbands Bosworth parish register includes the marriage of 'William BOTT of Naseby'. In 1813 the first reference to a BOTT appears in the Naseby parish register. The 1841 census of Naseby features six BOTT households. In contrast, members of the family recorded there by the 1851 census appear in three BOTT households and three BODFISH. The 1861 and later censuses refer to all members of the family living at Naseby as BOTT. Comparison of parish register christenings with the ages and birthplaces given in the census confirms that the same individuals were using either version on different occasions.

The 1881 census index for Northamptonshire includes a total of 68 people called BOTT; of these 21 were living at Naseby and a further 5 had been born there. 19 Northamptonshire residents were called BODFISH. An echo of the origins of the Bott surname at Naseby appears at Guilsborough in the census record for Hephzibah BOTTISH, aged 20, who had been born at Naseby; her surname had been written as BOTT in the 1861 and 1871 enumeration.

The Bodfish surname has changed in at least one other way. Samuel (1785-1854) was a grandson of George and Sarah. He moved from Naseby to Countesthorpe, near Leicester - where he and his descendants have been known by the surname BOAT.

The surname shift at Naseby is now beyond living memory. However, my great aunt, Catherine Florence Bott (1874-1965) who was brought up in the village, recalled that she had been told the surname was previously BOTFINCH or BOTKINCH. It is likely that this information came from people such as her grandfather Thomas Bott (1816-1902). The precise spelling was not important before the advent of literacy - like all others of the family whose marriages have been found in the Naseby parish register before the middle of the 19th century, Thomas made a mark rather than signing his name at the time of his marriage in 1840. Spellings used by those who recorded key events in his life were:

- 1816 BODFISH (baptism at Naseby as son of Thomas & Hannah)
- 1840 BOTT (marriage at Husbands Bosworth as son of Thomas)
- 1841 BOTT (census as born in Northamptonshire & husband of Catherine)
- 1851-1891 BOTT (censuses as born at Naseby & husband of Catherine)
- 1901 BOTT (census as born at Naseby, a widower)
- 1902 BOTT (registration of death at Naseby aged 86)

The censuses record Thomas living at Naseby and of an age consistent with baptism in 1816.

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Appendix B: The origins of Elizabeth Goll

All Saints Theddingworth[14]

The parish register of Theddingworth, which is two miles north of Sibbertoft, records the baptism on 1 February 1676/1677 of 'Elizabeth Goll the daughter of John Goll and Elizabeth his wife', a couple whose five children were all baptised at Theddingworth:

	Baptised	Married	Buried
Elizabeth	1676/7	John Bodfish 1702	1746 Naseby
Ann	1679		
Joane	1681	n/a	1693 Theddingworth
Mary	1682/3		
John	1691		

The parents' marriage is recorded in two parish registers:

- Theddingworth – 'John Goll and Elizabeth Rice marryed November ye 27th 1675'
- North Kilworth – '1675 .... John Gall of Thedingworth and Elizabeth Rice were married at North Kilworth on November the last day'

Theddingworth bishops transcript records the burial on 14 June 1691 of 'William Sturgis & John Goll'. The burial record does not state whether the person buried then was Elizabeth's husband or their last known child. Doubt is resolved by this record in Theddingworth parish register:
'1692.... Samuell Furborrow & Eliz Goll Married ye first of May'

[14] The picture by J Pridden is dated 13 June 1791.It was published as Plate CXXXIV at page 827 in volume 2, part 2 of *The history and antiquities of the county of Leicester* by John Nichols.
https://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p15407coll6/id/5328

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Samuell and Elizabeth had these children baptised at Theddingworth:

	Baptised	Married	Buried
Samuel	1693		
Hannah	1695/6		
Thomas	1697/8	n/a	1697/8 Theddingworth
Samuel	1699		

The parents appear to have remained at Theddingworth for the rest of their lives, as 'Samuell Furburrow' was buried there on 20 August 1717 and 'Elizabeth Thirdborough widow' on 27 March 1739.